

# Chilcotin language

**Chilcotin** (also **Tsilhqot'in**, **Tsilhqot'ín**, **Tsilhqut'in**, **Tzilkotin**) is a Northern Athabaskan language spoken in British Columbia by the Tsilhqot'in people.

The name *Chilcotin* is derived from the Chilcotin name for themselves: *T̓silhqot'in* [t͡sʰəɪ̯qʰot'in], literally "people of the red ochre river".

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Chilcotin	
<i>T̓sinlhqut'in</i>	
Native to	Canada
Region	Chilcotin Country, Central Interior of British Columbia
Ethnicity	4,350 Tsilhqot'in (2014, FPCC) <sup>[1]</sup>
Native speakers	860 (2014, FPCC) <sup>[1]</sup>
Language family	<div>Dené–Yeniseian? <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li> Na-Dené<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Athabaskan<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Northern Athabaskan<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><b>Chilcotin</b></li></ul></li></ul></li></ul></li></ul></div>
Language codes	
ISO 639-3	clc
Glottolog	chil1280 (http://glottolog.org/resource/language/id/chil1280) <sup>[2]</sup>

## Phonology

### Consonants

Chilcotin has 47 consonants:

		Bilabial	Dental			Alveolar	Palatal	Velar		Uvular		Glottal
			central	sibilant	lateral			plain	labial	plain	labial	
Nasal		m	ɱ									
Occlusive	tenuis	p	t̪	t͡ɬ	t̪̥	t͡ɬʰ	tʃ	k	kʷ	q	qʷ	
	aspirated	pʰ	t̪ʰ	t͡ɬʰ	t̪̥ʰ	t͡ɬʰʰ	tʃʰ	kʰ	kʷʰ	qʰ	qʷʰ	
	ejective		t̪ʰ̥	t͡ɬʰ̥	t̪̥ʰ̥	t͡ɬʰ̥ʰ̥	tʃʰ̥	kʰ̥	kʷʰ̥	qʰ̥	qʷʰ̥	ʔ
Continuant	voiceless			ɬ	ɬ̥	ɬʰ	ç		xʷ	χ	χʷ	h
	voiced			ʒ	l	zʰ	j		w	ʁ	ʁʷ	

- Like many other Athabaskan languages, Chilcotin does not have a contrast between fricatives and approximants.
- The alveolar series is pharyngealized.
- Dentals and alveolars:
  - Both Krauss (1975) and Cook (1993) describe the dental and alveolar as being essentially identical in articulation, *postdental*, with the only differentiating factor being their different behaviours in the vowel flattening processes (described below).

- Gafos (1999, personal communication with Cook) describes the dental series as *apico-laminal denti-alveolar* and the alveolar series as *lamino-postalveolar*.

## Vowels

Chilcotin has 6 vowels:

	Front				Back	
	tense-long	lax-short	tense-long	lax-short	tense-long	lax-short
<u>High</u>	i	ɪ			u	ʊ
<u>Low</u>			æ	ɛ		

- Chilcotin has both tense and lax vowel phonemes. Additionally, tense vowels may become lax from vowel laxing.

Every given Chilcotin vowel has a number of different phonetic realizations from complex phonological processes (such as nasalization, laxing, flattening). For instance, the vowel /i/ can be variously pronounced [i, ɪ̃, ɪ, e, ɐi, ɐɪ̃, ɐɪ].

## Tone

Chilcotin is a tonal language with two tones: high tone and low tone.

## Phonological processes

Chilcotin has vowel flattening and consonant harmony. Consonant harmony (sibilant harmony) is rather common in the Athabaskan language family. Vowel flattening is unique to Chilcotin but is similar to phonological processes in other unrelated Interior Salishan languages spoken in the same area, such as Shuswap, St'át'imcets, and Thompson River Salish (and thus was probably borrowed into Chilcotin). That type of harmony is an areal feature common in this region of North America. The Chilcotin processes, however, are much more complicated.

### Vowel nasalization and laxing

Vowel nasalization is a phonological process by which the phoneme /n/ nasalizes the preceding vowel. It occurs when the vowel + /n/ sequence is followed by a (tautosyllabic) continuant consonant (such as /ɬ, s<sup>ɰ</sup>, z<sup>ɰ</sup>, ʃ, j, ɣ/).

	/pinɬ/	→	[pɪ̃ɬ]	'trap'
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Vowel laxing is a process by which tense vowels (/i, u, æ/) become lax when followed by a syllable-final /h/: the tense and lax distinction is neutralized.

	/ʔɛstɪ 'uh/	→	[ʔɛstɪ̃ 'ʊh]	'I'm knitting'	(u → ʊ)
	/sɛjæh/	→	[sɛjɛh]	'my throat'	(æ → ɛ)

### Vowel flattening

Chilcotin has a type of retracted tongue root harmony. Generally, "flat" consonants lower vowels in both directions. Assimilation is both progressive and regressive.

Chilcotin consonants can be grouped into three categories: neutral, sharp, and flat.

Neutral	Sharp	Flat	
<p>p, p<sup>h</sup>, m</p> <p>t, t<sup>h</sup>, t', n</p> <p>tɬ, tɬ<sup>h</sup>, tɬ', ɬ, l</p> <p>tʃ, tʃ<sup>h</sup>, tʃ', ʃ, ʒ, j</p> <p>ʔ, h</p>	<p>ts, ts<sup>h</sup>, ts', s, z</p> <p>k, k<sup>h</sup>, k'</p> <p>k<sup>w</sup>, k<sup>w h</sup>, k' <sup>w</sup>, x<sup>w</sup>, w</p>	<b>s<sup>ʃ</sup>-series:</b>	ts <sup>ʃ</sup> , ts <sup>h ʃ</sup> , ts' <sup>ʃ</sup> , s <sup>ʃ</sup> , z <sup>ʃ</sup>
		<b>q-series:</b>	q, q <sup>h</sup> , q', χ, ɸ q <sup>w</sup> , q <sup>w h</sup> , q' <sup>w</sup> , χ <sup>w</sup> , ɸ <sup>w</sup>

- Flat consonants trigger vowel flattening.
- Sharp consonants block vowel flattening.
- Neutral consonants do not affect vowel flattening in any way.

The flat consonants can be further divided into two types:

1. a **s<sup>ʃ</sup>**-series (i.e. /ts<sup>ʃ</sup>, ts<sup>h ʃ</sup>, ts' <sup>ʃ</sup>/, etc.), and
2. a **q**-series (i.e. /q, q<sup>w</sup>, q<sup>h</sup>/, etc.).

The **s<sup>ʃ</sup>**-series is stronger than the **q**-series by affecting vowels farther away.

This table shows both unaffected vowels and flattened vowels:

unaffected vowel	flattened vowel
i	əi or e
ɪ	əɪ
u	o
ʊ	ɔ
ε	ə
æ	a

The vowel /i/ surfaces as [əi] if after a flat consonant and as [e] before a flat consonant:

	/s <sup>ʃ</sup> it/	→	[s <sup>ʃ</sup> əit]	'kingfisher'	(s <sup>ʃ</sup> flattens i → əi)
	/nis <sup>ʃ</sup> ts <sup>ʃ</sup> un/	→	[nes <sup>ʃ</sup> ts <sup>ʃ</sup> on]	'owl'	(s <sup>ʃ</sup> flattens i → e)

The progressive and regressive flattening processes are described below.

## Progressive flattening

In the *progressive* (left-to-right) flattening, the **q**-series consonants affect only the immediately following vowel:

	/ɸit <sup>h</sup> i/	→	[ɸəit <sup>h</sup> i]	'I slept'	(ɸ flattens i → əi)
	/q <sup>h</sup> æniɕ/	→	[q <sup>h</sup> anɪɕ]	'spoon'	(q <sup>h</sup> flattens æ → a)

Like the **q**-series, the stronger **s<sup>ʃ</sup>**-series consonants affects the immediately following vowel. However, it affects the vowel in the following syllable as well if the first flattened vowel is a lax vowel. If the first flattened is tense, the vowel of the following syllable is not flattened.

	/s <sup>ʃ</sup> εɬ.t <sup>h</sup> in/	→	[s <sup>ʃ</sup> əɬ.t <sup>h</sup> əin]	'he's comatose'	(s <sup>ʃ</sup> flattens both ε → ə, i → əi)
	/s <sup>ʃ</sup> i.t <sup>h</sup> in/	→	[s <sup>ʃ</sup> əi.t <sup>h</sup> in]	'I'm sleeping'	(s <sup>ʃ</sup> flattens first i → əi, but not second i: *s <sup>ʃ</sup> əit <sup>h</sup> əin)

Thus, the neutral consonants are transparent in the flattening process. In the first word /s<sup>ɿ</sup>ɛ̃.t<sup>h</sup>in/ 'he's comatose', /s<sup>ɿ</sup>/ flattens the /ɛ/ of the first syllable to [ə] and the /i/ of the second syllable to [əi]. In the word /s<sup>ɿ</sup>i.t<sup>h</sup>in/ 'I'm sleeping', /s<sup>ɿ</sup>/ flattens /i/ to [əi]. Since, however, the vowel of the first syllable is /i/, which is a tense vowel, the /s<sup>ɿ</sup>/ cannot flatten the /i/ of the second syllable.

The sharp consonants, however, block the progressive flattening caused by the s<sup>ɿ</sup>-series:

	/tiz <sup>ɿ</sup> .k <sup>ʰ</sup> ɛn/	→	[tɛz <sup>ɿ</sup> .k <sup>ʰ</sup> ɛn]	'it's burning'	(flattening of ɛ is blocked by k <sup>ʰ</sup> : *tɛz <sup>ɿ</sup> k <sup>ʰ</sup> ən)
	/s <sup>ɿ</sup> ɛ.kɛn/	→	[s <sup>ɿ</sup> ə.kɛn]	'it's dry'	(flattening of ɛ is blocked by k: *s <sup>ɿ</sup> əkən)

## Regressive flattening

In regressive (right-to-left) harmony, the q-series flattens the preceding vowel.

	/ʔæləx/	→	[ʔələx]	'I made it'	(χ flattens æ → ə)
	/junɛq <sup>h</sup> æt/	→	[junəq <sup>h</sup> at]	'he's slapping him'	(q <sup>h</sup> flattens ɛ → ə)

The regressive (right-to-left) harmony of the s<sup>ɿ</sup>-series, however, is much stronger than the progressive harmony. The consonants flatten all preceding vowels in a word:

	/kuniz <sup>ɿ</sup> /	→	[konez <sup>ɿ</sup> ]	'it is long'	(z <sup>ɿ</sup> flattens all vowels, both i → e, u → o)
	/k <sup>w</sup> ɛtɛkuljúz <sup>ɿ</sup> /	→	[k <sup>w</sup> ətəkɔljóz <sup>ɿ</sup> ]	'he is rich'	(z <sup>ɿ</sup> flattens all vowels)
	/næk <sup>w</sup> ɛnits <sup>ɿ</sup> és <sup>ɿ</sup> /	→	[nak <sup>w</sup> ənets <sup>ɿ</sup> əs <sup>ɿ</sup> ]	'fire's gone out'	(ts <sup>ɿ</sup> , s <sup>ɿ</sup> flatten all vowels)

Both progressive and regressive flattening processes occur in Chilcotin words:

	/niq <sup>h</sup> in/	→	[neq <sup>h</sup> əin]	'we paddled'
	/ʔɛq <sup>h</sup> ɛn/	→	[ʔəq <sup>h</sup> ən]	'husband'

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## External links

- The Chilcotin Language (<http://www.ydli.org/langs/chilcotin.htm>) (YDLI)
- Bibliography of Materials on the Chilcotin Language (<http://www.ydli.org/biblios/chilbib.htm>) (YDLI)

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